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MOSCOW FOR KIM SVEC

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TAGS: [AM](#) [EAGR](#)
SUBJECT: ARMENIA: UPDATE ON THE SPREAD OF AFRICAN SWINE
FEVER

REF: A. YEREVAN 01193
[1](#)B. YEREVAN 01120

SUMMARY

[1](#)1. (SBU) As of Mid-December 2007, approximately 14,000 swine had died or been culled in Armenia due to ASF, according to government estimates. Post confirmed reports of outbreak in four regions in addition to Nagorno-Karabakh. The Government has been slow to react to the spreading virus despite the warnings and assistance of the international community. The failure of the GOAM's compensation program for farmers affected by the outbreak could become an election issue. END SUMMARY.

New ASF Commission Established

[1](#)2. (U) On December 17, Poloff met with Deputy Minister of Agriculture Levon Rukhyan to inquire about the Armenian government's efforts to combat the spread of ASF since receiving recommendations from UN/FAO as outlined in reftel and in fulfillment of the action plan agreed to by Prime Minister Sargsyan during his October visit to Washington for the U.S. Armenia Economic Task Force (USATF) meeting. Rukhyan informed Poloff that he continues to chair the GOAM's ASF Task Force that meets daily to discuss the outbreak and assured Poloff that his Ministry had a good handle on the situation. In addition, Rukhyan stated that an ASF Commission had been created in September as a means to facilitate discussions and coordination at a higher level. This commission is comprised of the heads of the various stake-holder Ministries, the Deputy Prime Minister who acts as chairman, and the governors of the regions (Marzs).

New Outbreaks

[1](#)3. (U) Rukhyan confirmed that there had been new outbreaks in Kotayk and Ararat Marzs and that the ASF Task Force had responded accordingly, dispatching representatives to oversee containment. In the case of Kotayk Marz, the outbreak consisted of one farm in which 110 swine had been culled. In Ararat Marz, again one farm had been affected and approximately 300 swine culled. According to Rukhyan, the Ministry of Agriculture has also established decontamination checkpoints surrounding the outbreak villages in Kotayk and Ararat.

[1](#)4. (U) Rukhyan acknowledged that the outbreak was still a

problem in Lori and Tavush Marzs and that a quarantine was still in place there. In total, he estimated that 14,000 swine had either died or been culled by mid-December not including the 3-4,000 swine that had been affected in the breakaway, Armenian-controlled Nagorno-Karabakh (N-K) region of Azerbaijan. In response to the N-K outbreak, the Ministry of Agriculture had banned all pork imports and installed checkpoints at relevant points of entry. In spite of the rising number of infected swine, Deputy Minister Rukhyan claimed that the number of reported cases had declined since the onset of winter.

Inconsistent Application of Safety Measures

¶5. (SBU) When Poloff mentioned reports of unmanned checkpoints and empty disinfectant pools, Rukhyan acknowledged that not all inspectors were as vigilant as he was about the problem, and that he had personally driven to a number of checkpoints to observe their procedures. Rukhyan also implied that the lack of vigilance was a reflection of the overall fatigue visible within the GOAM and populace of hearing that ASF was an "emergency" issue.

¶6. (U) Rukhyan stated that the GOAM had been very pleased with the support it had received to date from USAID and the USDA in establishing regional support centers that assisted in the distribution of information about ASF to the local populace. However, he cited a recent incident of when he had to personally pull an ASF-affected carcass from a stream as evidence that much of the rural populace had yet to read the materials.

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Ministry of Agriculture's Response

¶7. (SBU) In response to Poloff's questions about the implementation of reftel UN/FAO action plan, Rukhyan stated that they were not implementing the plan but rather working with the local USDA office while pursuing a policy of financial compensation for those farmers with affected swine. However, as of Mid-December the GOAM had yet to receive some 750,000 USD inherited from the World Bank's previous Avian Influenza (WBAI) program in Armenia and therefore could not proceed with the compensation plan. As a result, many farmers who had been forced to cull swine were upset and this was becoming an election issue. In addition, Rukhyan stated that his ministry was attempting to keep pork prices low by giving fines to pork speculators. According to Rukhyan, the ban on Armenian pork exports to Russia was also helping to maintain price stability since all Armenian meat had to stay in country.

USDA Estimates and Concerns

¶8. (SBU) Post's resident USDA experts estimate that as of mid-December the total number of swine that had died or been culled in Armenia because of ASF was approximately 11,000. However, their estimate on the number of swine affected in N-K was as much as 9,000 dead or culled, much greater than the figure stated by the Armenian Ministry of Agriculture. According to USDA's contacts with connections to N-K, the GOAM was using all available resources including those provided by the World Bank, UN/FAO, and USAID to assist the N-K outbreak. (NOTE: The breakaway Azerbaijani region of Nagorno-Karabakh is controlled by the self-declared "Republic of Nagorno Karabakh" or "NKR" authorities. While the "NKR" is formally separate from the Republic of Armenia, there are considerable political and economic ties between the "NKR" and Armenia proper. USG personnel are restricted from

visiting N-K. END NOTE)

¶9. (U) ASF has also reached farms near Yerevan, and has even affected the personal menagerie of Armenian oligarch Gagik Tsaroukyan in a Yerevan suburb. USDA representatives blame

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the continued spread of the virus on poor implementation of the quarantine and non-compliance with the agricultural recommendations made at the USATF conference in October. Vehicular decontamination points and meat inspections are either non-existent or poorly functioning. There should be an economic payoff, however, for those independent farmers that successfully protect their herds with rigorous sanitation and containment practices, as only they will be in a position to bring safe meat to market when prices rise.

Comment

¶10. (SBU) The GOAM's lack of capacity and resolve to respond effectively to the ASF outbreak is evident in the increasing number of affected swine in Armenia and neighboring Nagorno-Karabakh. While the onset of winter may have temporarily slowed the virus' spread due to snow covering the contaminated soil and reduced inter-actions between mountainous rural areas, an accelerated resurgence of the virus could appear after the spring thaw. Furthermore, post questions to what extent Armenia's poor handling of the ASF outbreak could reflect on its ability to combat epidemics that are harmful to humans such as Avian Influenza. The failure to date of the GOAM's compensation plan does not augur well for farmers' continued and future cooperation with government-ordered biosecurity measures, in addition to potentially becoming a political liability for the government in rural areas.

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